

**THE GLAMOUR OF OLD TIME DAYS  
AROUND THE  
DETROIT RIVER  
AND  
ESSEX COUNTY**

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**An Historical Sketch reminding us that  
our inheritance was won by great deeds  
and unstinting sacrifices.**

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## The Glamour of "Old Time Days" around the Detroit River and Essex County

HOW frequently, as we sail on the beautiful Detroit River near Windsor, or wend our way along splendid Highways, winding their romantic way along its shores, does the mind go back to the distant past when all its beauty was graced by Nature's lovely hand so profusely and graciously. Across the river on the American Shores great towering skyscrapers and great chimneys with their belching smoke wraiths mark the phenomenon of the years since those days of exploration and discovery, and we wonder what kind of men were those who first glimpsed the grandeur of the Detroit, and gazed spell-bound upon the virgin loveliness of this, one of the most beautiful scenic areas on the North American Continent. History has been kind to us for it has preserved for us their names and all the delightful things they said about it.

It was in the early spring of 1670 the first white men passed through the Detroit from Lake Erie to Lake St. Claire and on through into Lake Huron, Francis Dollier and de Galinee, who had been told of this great waterway by Louis Joliet who the previous year had passed through the strait, Le Detroit, when he contacted La Salle and his party near the Grand River.

There on the banks of the Detroit opposite our Windsor of to-day, they erected the first altar, and sang the first "Te Deum," and said the first Mass, and dared to destroy the huge idol that stood there gazing with stern gaze upon the waterway, the Manitou, who according to the Indian guide held in his hand the winds, and whose mighty voice could be heard in the wild storms that swept over the Lakes. Here the Indians paused on their journeys with their offerings, and by gifts to the Manitou sought to gain a propitious passage through the strait, Le Detroit. In anger the good priests smashed the idol into a thousand pieces, and erected in its place a great cross, and at its feet placed the coat of arms of France, to mark forever this fair land as part of the domain of France under Christian domination. Having done this they passed on in their epoch-making journey into the great Fresh Water Sea, Lake Huron. Nine years later the great La Salle with his gallant little ship, the Griffin, passed this way, and Father Hennepin, the Great historian priest of this first sailing vessel expedition, wrote as follows of the scenes that met their eager gaze.

"We found," he wrote, "the country on both sides of this beautiful strait, the Detroit, adorned with fine open plains. Any number of stags, deer, bears (by no means fierce and very good to eat) wild turkey in abundance, and all kinds of game. The vessels' guys were loaded and decked with the wild animals our French and Indian hunters shot on both banks of the river and dressed. The islands on both shores of the straits are covered with primeval forests, fruit trees, like walnuts, chestnuts, plums and apple trees, wild vines loaded with grapes, of which later some were gathered, and a quantity of wine made. The vast herds of deer surprised us all, and it appears to be the place of all others where the deer love to congregate!"

And then as they reached later a circular-shaped lake at the head of the river, they gave it the name we know it by to-day. Father Hennepin officiated at the christening. As they arose from their devotion that lovely summer evening, he addressed them in a short discourse and concluded by saying:

"This is the feast of Ste. Claire, let us commemorate it by bestowing her name on this beautiful sheet of water. Thereby we solemnly baptize it Lac Sainte Claire, by which it will henceforth be known."

And thus the historian wrote later of this memorable event: "We all pledged the newly christened lake in many a bumper of wine made from the Detroit River grapes."

The cradle of settlement of Upper Canada (Ontario) is the beautiful Detroit River District, where there were several hundred settlers before the close of the French period—at a time when all the rest of Ontario was a primeval wilderness: Both Americans and Canadians of to-day dwelling on either side of the Detroit River must go back to the period of French exploration and colonization to begin the white man's history in this area. They meet here on common ground, and may revel in the most glamorous and romantic epoch in the History of America.



The first settlement arose as a consequence of the fur trade, for the European demand for beaver skin hats led the adventurous British and French to push further into the wilds, each vying with each other in an attempt to win the trading friendship of the Indians to thereby assure them the domination of this area.

The great French explorer-discoverers, Nicolet, Perrot, DuLuth, vied with the British from Albany, Fort Orange; The French established at Fort Michilimackinac, dominated the trade for years but the indomitable British kept pressing in on these lands and waters, giving more favourable trade terms than the French for the furs, and actually thereby diminishing the trade at Fort Michilimackinac. Antoine Laumet de la Mothe Cadillac, the commandant at Mackinac, saw the seriousness of the situation, and fearing that the British would secure control of all the great west Lands recommended to the Governor of New France the establishment of a Fort on the Strait to block the upward progress of the British rivals. On June 1st, 1701, twenty-five canoes manned by 50 soldiers and 50 voyageurs, and a number of small canoes, set out from Montreal along the Ottawa and Georgian Bay Trail. Forty-nine days later, after making some thirty portages, their historic and glamorous expedition reached the region suggested as the most strategic for this post. and Detroit, "City of the Strait" came into being. It was not called Detroit, but Fort Pontchartrain after the French Minister of Marine.

By September 1st, the entire settlement was enclosed by a stockade; the enclosure had an area of 37 acres, and Ste. Anne's Church which still exists in the centre thereof, although burned down several times, became the centre of the religious and social life of the area.

In the summer of 1702, the first white women arrived at the settlement, Madame Cadillac, and Madame Touty, and others, and now for the first time on the Detroit River, white men and women and children made the echoes ring with their joyous music, folksongs and chatter, and all the arts and wiles of the French race soon brought into existence a happy contented oasis in the midst of the great primeval wilderness, and along the trail now known as Jefferson Avenue, farmers soon began to bring their produce to market.

For half a century the settlement had to fight for its existence against the Indians jealous of one another and the French. The Hurons located near the post; across the river on the site of Walkerville, the Ottawa's established a village; while to the West and South the Miamis and Pottawatomies settled also, whilst Northward dwelt the war-like Chippewa's and Objibways; all these tribes fought one another—friends some of them at times with the French, allied with them against the others—always some of them threatening the very life and peace and comfort of the settlers. Under Pontiac they besieged Detroit for 153 days, but the settlers stuck it out and Pontiac and his allies on both sides of the river abandoned the siege.

Despite the constant alarms and threats, settlements were gradually made on both sides of the river. In 1728 a Jesuit priest arrived at Detroit, and soon after established a Huron Mission on the opposite shore, where the village of Sandwich grew up later: The mission-house remained until the early years of the present century—To-day one can see its location, as well as the site on which the first church was erected, also a priests' residence and storehouse for furs and provisions and a blacksmith shop.

This was the beginning of what we know to-day as the British side of the Detroit River: Between 1734 and 1756, numerous land grants were made by the French Crown to prospective settlers, many of them ex-soldiers of New France and Old France, and these men erected their small homes in straggling shore settlements on the Ontario side of the Detroit, thus becoming the pioneer fathers of the present-day lands of Essex County.





Louis XIV of France delivering to Chevalier de Cadillac grant and authority to found and build Fort Pontchartrain (Detroit) in 1701.



The settlements along the shore of the Detroit were arranged in long, narrow ribbons of land with a frontage on the river, and a group of these were called a *côte*, between Amherstburg and Sandwich, for example, was located Petite Côte, a name which long survived. The land was held under feudal tenure from the Seignors of the area, aristocrats of Old France and New, each of whom in addition to his Manor-house was required to erect a grist-mill and blockhouse. These common windmill forts played an important function in the development of the industrial, social, and defensive life of these areas stretching for miles as the Border Communities do to-day along the blue waters of the Detroit. At the time of the British conquest of Canada in 1759, the French settlements of the Ontario side of the Detroit were considered to be in a prosperous and flourishing condition—several hundred settlers living a happy care-free existence in that lovely river area between the present site of Windsor and the River Canard. It was not until after the Revolutionary War that many British settlers began to percolate into this area. Though the Revolutionary War came to an end in 1783, Detroit remained in British control until 1796, when by the Jay Treaty it was transferred to the United States.

On that account a new fort was hastily erected on the Canadian side of the river, 18 miles below, at the Mouth of the river by the British and to this fort, Malden, were removed all the guns and military stores from Fort Detroit.

A visitor, Isaac Weld, visited this district shortly after Fort Malden was built and found there about twenty houses near the fort. He stated also that there were also a few dwellings at the end of the district, and that the Detroit River was crowded with Indian canoes, bateaux and sailing ships, and several pleasure boats of the officers of the Garrison of the new Fort Malden.

The French settlers in the area preferred to remain with the British on our side of the River and in 1796 nearly 2000 of the inhabitants of Detroit moved into Upper Canada, Ontario, preferring to remain under the British Flag also. Some of these Loyalists settled near Lake Ste. Claire or along the Thames, but most of them just moved across the river to Sandwich, which was laid out for their reception: Among those who came to Sandwich was John Askin who became the grandfather of Major John Richardson, the first Canadian Novelist, the author of the War of 1812, and Canada's first historical novel.

In 1796, the first year of the actual settlement of Sandwich, a log building was erected to serve as a church. This was the first Protestant Church in all the Detroit River District. As lots were given to persons who would erect buildings, Sandwich gradually became a flourishing settlement.

Rev. Nathen Bangs, pioneer Methodist missionary, visited the Detroit River settlements in 1804-05, and preached at Sandwich and Malden on the Canadian side and in the Council-House in Detroit three times. He found Detroit an abandoned place—4 weeks later the town was consumed by fire, so from this date a new Detroit had to be erected. In fact this fire of June 11, 1804, practically destroyed the whole town for—"when night fell there was but one important warehouse and a few tottering stone chimneys left standing above the glowing embers of what had once been the incorporated town of Detroit."

The United Empire Loyalists began to take up land in Essex County, the first of them arriving in 1784. They were really squatters because it was not until 1788 the Government Land Board of Hesse was created, when lots were granted to these Loyalists in the usual way.

Dutch Tories, pacifists, Pennsylvannians, Germans arrived in Essex during same period.

The change from French to British rule made but few variations in the daily life of the French inhabitants on the Canadian side of the border. D. W. Smith thus describes the riverside settlements on our Canadian side of the Detroit at this period: "There are several windmills on the Detroit, and an orchard adjoining almost every house. The settlers are numerous, and the improvements handsome and extensive, when the fruit trees are in blossom, the prospect as you pass through the Strait (Detroit River) is perhaps as delightful as any in the world."



Thus we see the beginning of real settlement and life on the ground where now exists the splendid Essex County of Canada of to-day. Right well was the foundation laid away back in those early days when the rest of Ontario was still almost a primeval wilderness.

But all did not go smoothly nevertheless. The Red Simoon of war broke upon this peaceful area of the Detroit—and those on both sides of the river, who had begun to become real friends, found themselves engulfed in a cruel and bitter war—the War of 1812-13-14.

Fort Malden—the outpost of Amherstburg became the base from which the British captured Detroit and the American Army under General Hull. From this fort later in the same war occurred the retreat of General Proctor to Moraviantown where the gallant Indian Chief, Tecumseh, was killed: The village which grew up near Fort Malden had been named Amherstburg in commemoration of General Lord Amherst, British commander in the Seven Years' War, thus perpetuating forever the name of the great Leader under whom British and American British colonists wrestled from the French all of New France in America. For nearly two years also when the tide of war turned against the British in 1813-14, Amherstburg was occupied by American troops, and it was here they concluded their campaign against Canada on land and in naval battles of Lake Erie.

In the old Fort Malden during the Rebellion of 1837-38, insurgents who invaded Canada at Windsor were confined in the old fort after the Battle of Windsor, where they were kept in irons for seven weeks.

The site of Windsor in 1812 was a meadow forming a part of Col. Francis Baby's farm. The farmhouse was located near the corner of the present church and Sandwich street. In 1828 Windsor was established as a stagecoach village. It was first called "The Ferry", a log canoe being used to carry passengers, freight and mail to Detroit. Its only opposition was another log canoe down the shore and the fare charged was 25¢ for the round trip. In 1827, the small and cranky little steamship "Argo" was placed in service by the Americans, and there has been steamship services on the Detroit ever since.

By 1833, Windsor had 15 or 20 wooden houses as well as several of brick in process of building. The opinion was expressed at this time "that the villiage would soon eclipse Sandwich and may rival Chatham."

In 1837, Windsor was known as Richmond. By the 40's it had become a place of considerable importance—and as Windsor as one writer says—"The village is a new place, formed in consequence of the Amercian tariff, to enable the inhabitants to smuggle British Goods across the river. The village therefore consists of two classes of men, storekeepers and tailors, the former to violate the laws of the United States, the latter to evade them, for a man coming from Detroit buys cloth for a suit, gets it made, and then marches back to Detroit with the new clothes on his back and the old ones in a bundle under the very nose of the Collector of Customs."

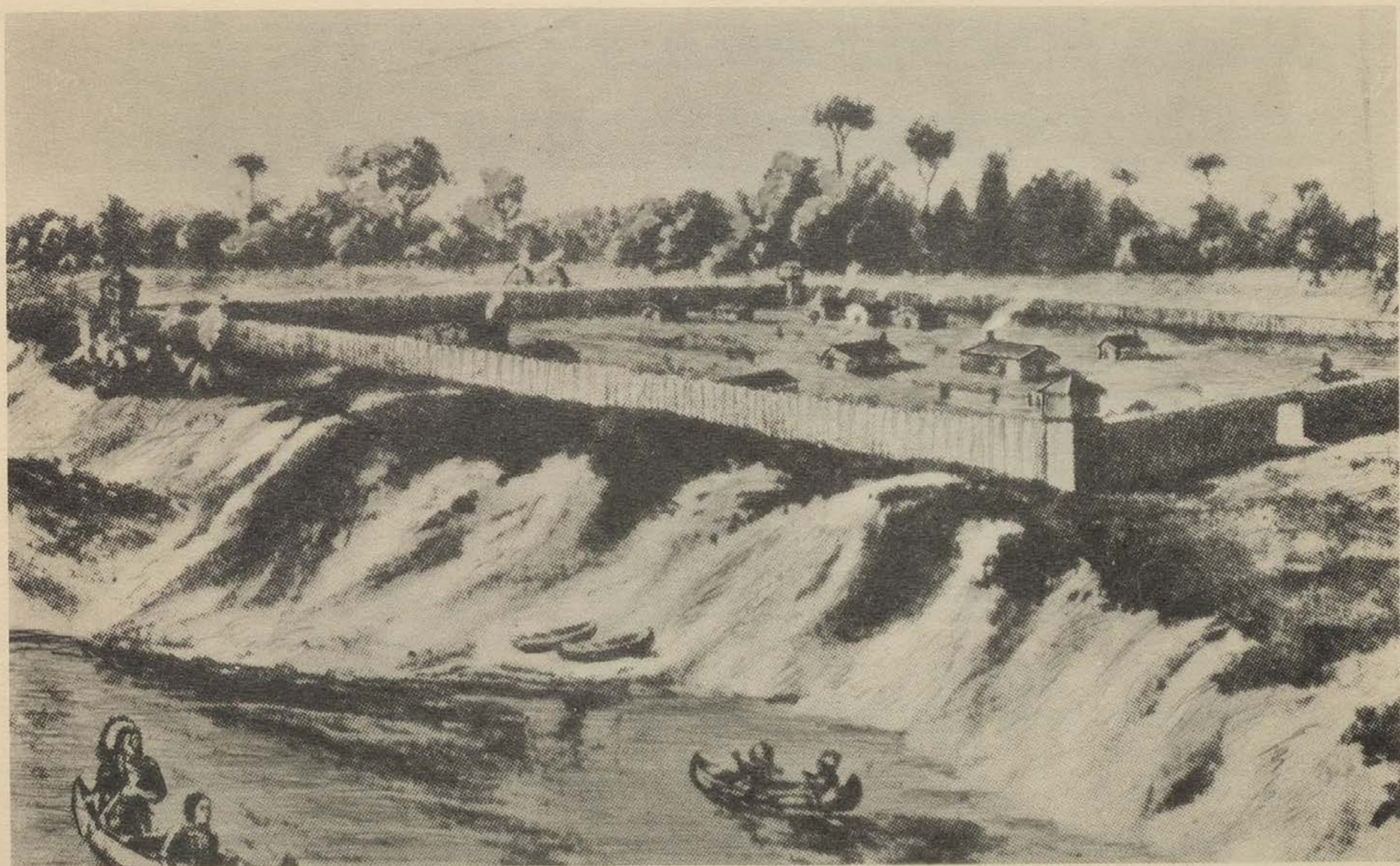
Be that as it may—the statement only shows how closely united these two sides of the river were becoming even then away back in the 1840's despite tariffs, etc.

Many hundreds of escaped negro slaves between 1820 and 1826 arrived in Canada at Amherstburg and settled at Amherstburg and Sandwich and 'tis to them the credit must be given for establishing what is now the great Tobacco Industry of Essex County.

Out of the colonization efforts above described, the population of Essex County in 1824 was only 4,274. By 1837, this had doubled. In the years following, Essex County became one of the most flourishing and thickly-populated counties in the province: famous to-day the world over for its fields of natural gas, fruit orchards, corn and tobacco fields, and world-famous industrial establishments growing every year more important on account of its close proximity to the great American Nation. Out of the troublous beginning, romantic and glamorous, Essex County has become the great bulwark for Canadian expansion and progress.

Deeply romantic as is the actual story of the foundation of the splendid cities of the Detroit River area, still more romantic and glamorous are the legends that surround many of the recreation sight-seeing spots of this splendid Wonderland area. Space will not permit for us to dwell in detail on these stories, but we shall present a few which in their beauty and romance will make our readers understand and appreciate all the more the enchantment that awaits the holidayer or visitor who may have the privilege of spending a holiday in the south western tip of Ontario's glorious Western Peninsula.





Old Fort Pontchartrain, 1701, built by Chevalier de Cadillac on authority  
of King Louis XIV of France.



Sailing along the Detroit and Lake Ste. Claire, the eye is still charmed by the beautiful islands which nestle on the bosom of these waters. The Indian legend regarding their origin is a pretty and poetical conception. One little island, one just above Belle Isle—Peach Island—as it is called, is a bit of fairyland around which romance has woven its magic spell, and which history has made intensely interesting:

"The Spirit", so the legend says, "who inhabited the Sand Mountains called the sleeping Bear, a point of land on the Eastern coast of Lake Michigan, noted for the prevalence of storms, had a daughter of such matchless beauty that her mother feared she might be stolen. The spirit hid her in a box, tying it by a long string to a stake on the beach and every day she would draw the box in to feed the fair maiden and comb her yellow hair.

The South Wind passed once at this hour. He saw her, and in absolute adoration, he breathed caressingly his soft and tender sighs through the golden meshes of her hair. This wooing of the South Wind gave birth to that beautiful, but too brief, Indian Summer.

The North and West Winds heard of the lovely maiden through their couriers. A fierce rivalry ensued and the elements were at war. A violent storm arose, snapped the frail thread which held the box to its moorings, and it drifted along borne by the waves to the lodge of the Prophet, the Keeper of the Gates of the Lakes, who resided at the outlet of Lake Huron. Joyfully he took the maiden for his bride."

But alas the maiden brought evil in her train for the storm revived in all its fury, sweeping away the Lodge and portions of the land of the old magician. These floated down, and formed the islands in the Detroit River. The old prophet was buried beneath Isle aux Pêches which became the Mecca of the Ottawa warriors. The fragments of the box formed Belle Isle, and the great Manitou to prevent further trouble imprisoned the maiden on Belle Isle and girdled the island with rattlesnakes, who were held in superstitious awe and veneration by the Indians. Out of a long distant past this remarkable legend still lends its glamour and enchantment to the Islands of the Detroit."

It was on the Isle aux Pêches that Pontiac, the wily leader of the Ottawa's, went to consult the Prophet, and there alone with the Prophet he was told after many days of communion with the Prophet to gather his tribes, to rise up, to be as strong as the winds of the Lakes and to go forth and strike Fort Detroit, and scatter the English who held Detroit, like leaves before the wind: Returning to his tribe, he sent his messengers from tribe to tribe, and village to village, and soon the wild hordes advanced upon Detroit bringing bloodshed, and rapine. Pontiac's Rebellion, this terrible attack on the English conquerors of Fort Detroit was called.

"On the Eve of Pentecost in the lovely month of June 1790, in the home of Dominique Gaudet of Sandwich was great merriment, and preparation for next day it was Dominique who was to present the blessed Eread and its accessory to be distributed at the High Mass. All was gayety and joy, and the young girls were singing merry songs whilst kneading the mass of dough. Suddenly looking at the river, they saw a figure of a man, who was apparently seated on the water. No canoe was visible but yet he seemed to glide along by the aid of a paddle. The increasing darkness prevented close inspection but suddenly they heard a grating on the sands of the shore and they all rushed down to the beach. They were greeted by Handsome David Fisher, who resided in Detroit, who had fallen in love with Soulangue Gaudet when she had visited her friends in Detroit. Their amazement was great when they found that David's canoe was a wheelbarrow. He laughed as he told them he had found no one to row him over, and no boat to be had and that he had to see Soulangue so he had devised this new method of crossing the Detroit." This story out of the past shows how Cupid won his way through even in those far-off days when the Detroit River separated two lovers by the width of its shores, for that evening David and Soulangue pledged their troth and agreed to wed at midsummer.



The romance of the Detroit River area seems to pervade almost every foot of ground of Essex County. Love, sorrow, adventure, war, ravage, conquest, victory all intermingle as the days of long ago are studied in its hundreds of legends and stories.

Sandwich as we have told you was the sacred spot on which the first Christian Church was erected as a Huron Mission, and later around it and about it, grew up Sandwich Village. In August 1806 the Hurons as was their yearly custom had come to encamp near the Church in Sandwich to celebrate the Great Indian Feast. After mass they filed out of the Church one by one, and in the grove nearby they prepared their grand feast to which they invited the clergy and inhabitants whom they knew well. They had a grand time, and at length tired of feasting, one of their number, a lively maiden, proposed that they should seek the prophetess of the tribe to tell to them their future and fortune.

With timid fear the maidens and youths all agreed to the venture and soon they wended their way through the forest. Suddenly at a turn in their path they came face to face with the prophetess who stirring a kettle on the smouldering fire, was chanting in a deep monotone a song of incantation to which she kept time by swaying her body. Frightened, the girls turned to flee. The Prophetess asked them—"What do you seek?" One of them replied—"Knowledge of the future." "Foolish ones," the prophetess cried, "see it for yourselves. It is written everywhere, on the broad face of the sky, on the leaves of the trees. Ere many moons this very soil will become the scene of carnage; the air will be filled with lamentations, these woods which have re-echoed to your careless merriment will resound to the savage warwhoop and the tomahawk will gleam in the upraised hands. Lovers will be separated, wives will be made widows, and children orphans. Go, you have heard enough."

The war of 1812 was thus foretold by the Prophetess, and the gay ones of that night saw anguish and suspense, some fighting under the banner of the Stars and Stripes, others the British Ensign. Some saw lovers captives, others killed, one of them even seeing her lover captive when the victorious Proctor passed through Sandwich. And the maiden of Sandwich afterwards joyfully heard how her lover, when he reached where now is Walkerville, escaped, found a canoe and crossed to the American side.

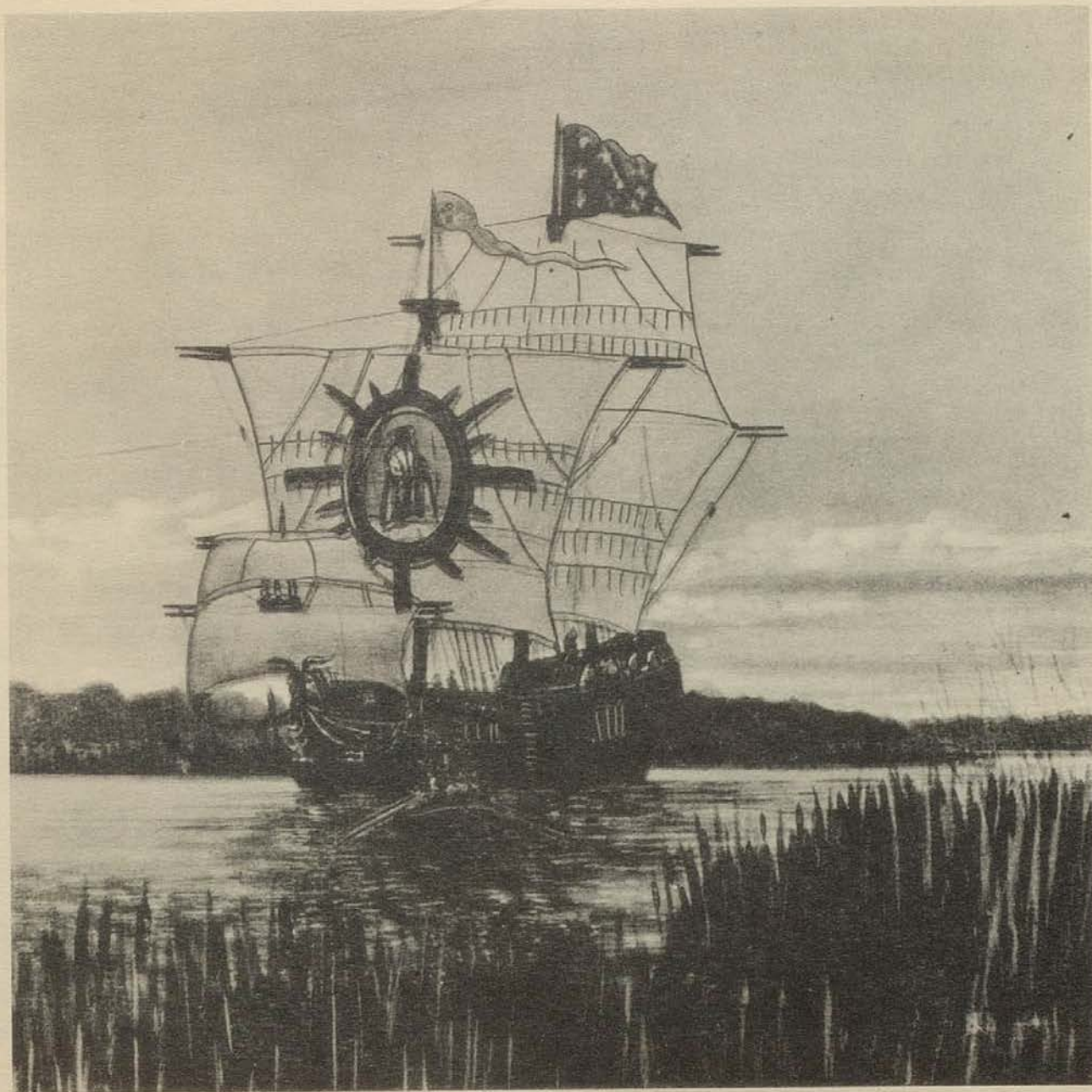
And so we could go on for hours telling romantic tales of Essex County areas, tales which on account of their International complexion make the whole area of the Detroit and Ste. Claire a happy tourist and pilgrimage ground for Americans and Canadians alike. Once foes, to-day a common tradition, a common love for their beautiful Detroit and Ste. Claire holds them close to each other in ties of friendship. Amherstburg, Fort Malden, Sandwich, Walkerville, the Old Road to London and points east, the Tecumseh Road, along which tens of thousands of their forefathers trekked in the days when they first came to settle in this Detroit River area, make the Canadian side of the Detroit a proper and fitting Tourist magnet for the people of both nations.

Everywhere as you journey midst the bustle and stir of great cities of the Detroit to-day on every hand are reminders of a glorious past. Every Canadian, every American, might well make a pilgrimage to this area, not only to see and partake of its glorious sport and sight-seeing and recreation glories, but to relive once more some of the many incidents of a past whose history lingers as an endowment that can never fade out. If we have been able to bring to you something of the glamour of the Detroit River and Essex County, we hope that this pictorial booklet will make you cherish all the more the days you have spent in this area.

If you have never visited there, we trust that this book will serve as an inspiration that will guide you to the lovely shores of Detroit and Ste. Claire.

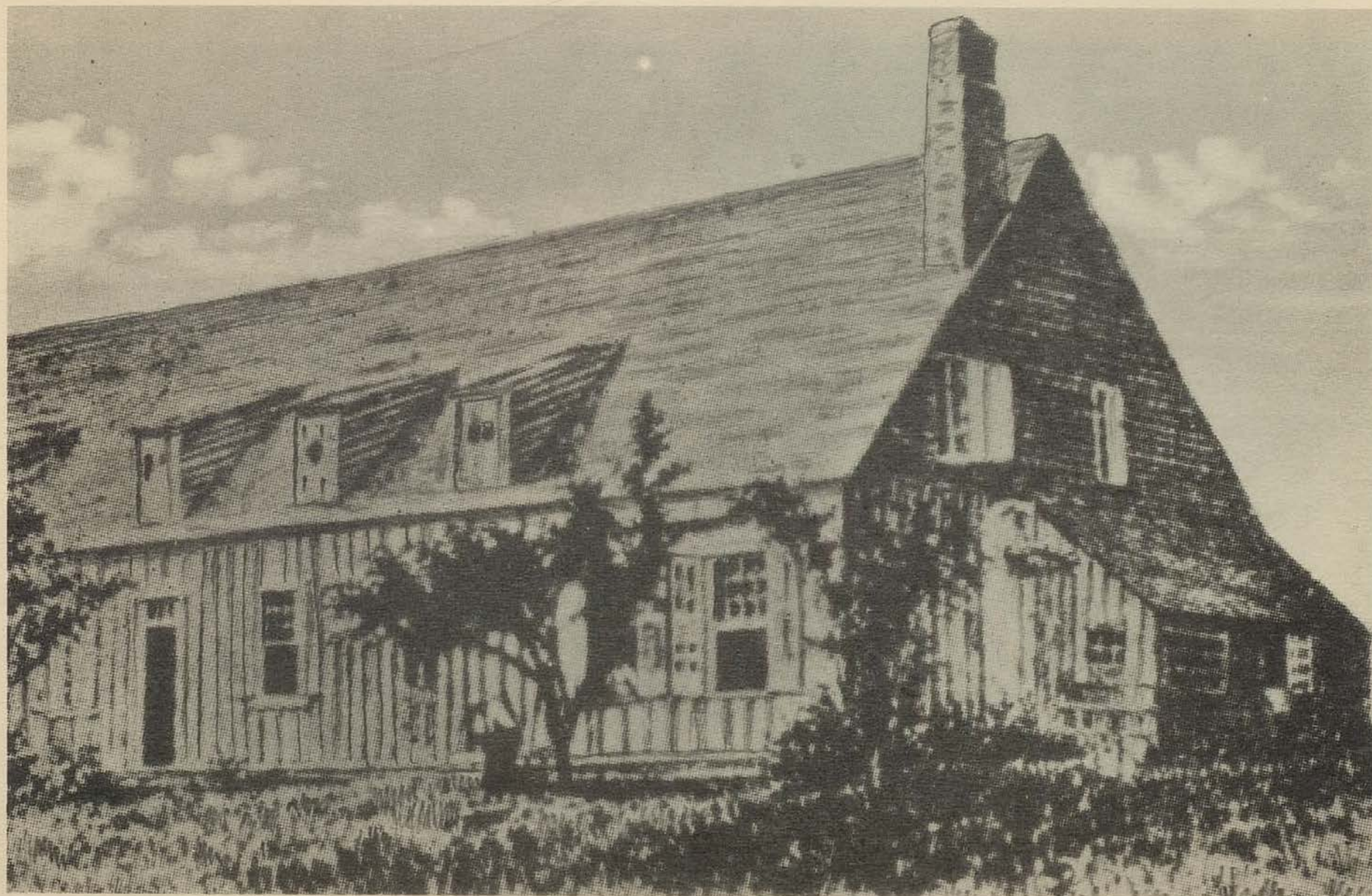
—Duncan W. Johnson





La Salle's Griffin  
first vessel ever  
to pass through  
Detroit waters  
year 1679.





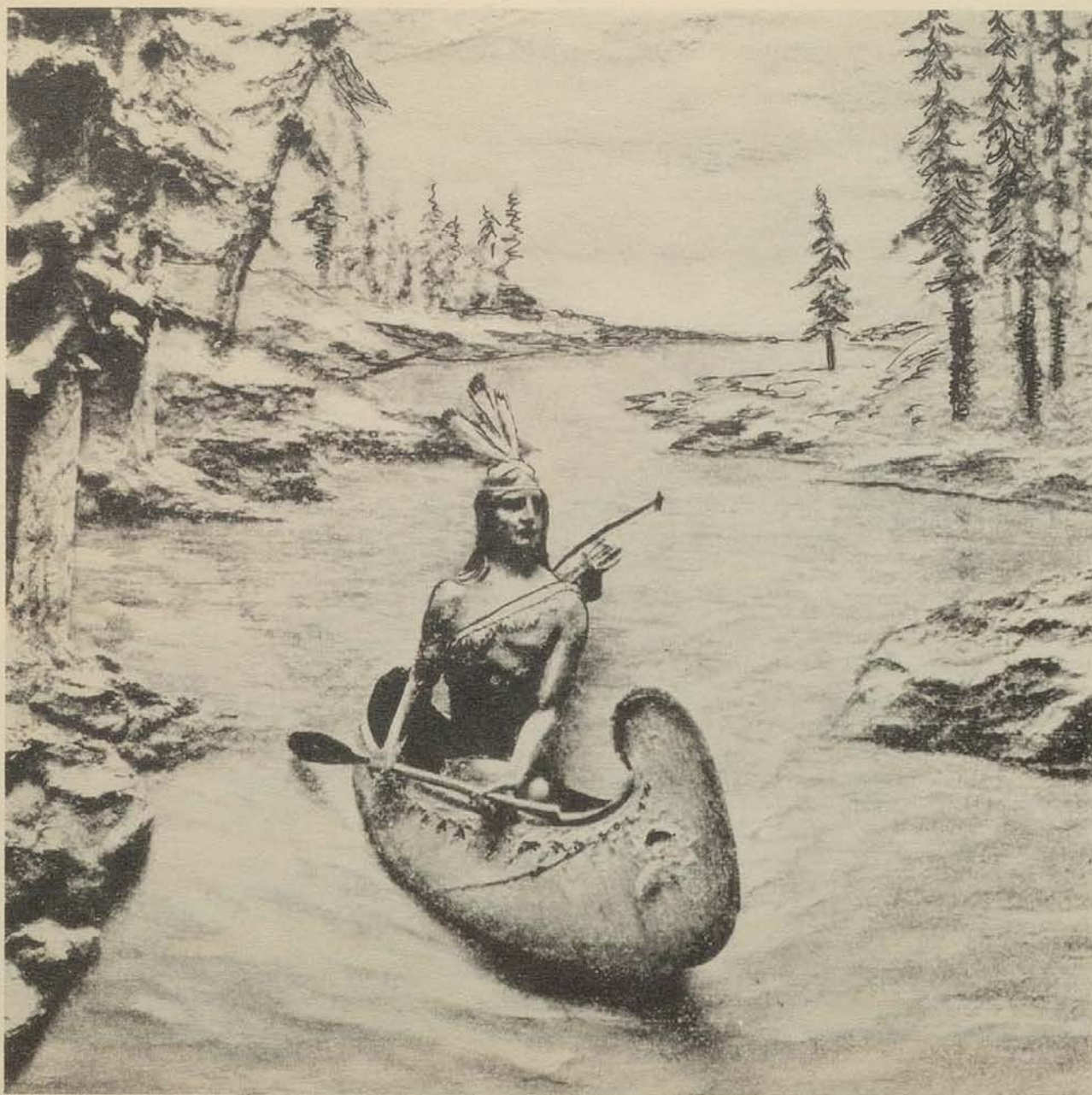
The old Jesuit Mission—House at Sandwich erected 1746. Around this building began Canadian Detroit River activity.





Land on Canadian side of river held by feudal tenure. Seigneurs required to build windmill and mill forts as above.





When Detroit River  
settlements were  
building the proud  
Indians observed  
it all.

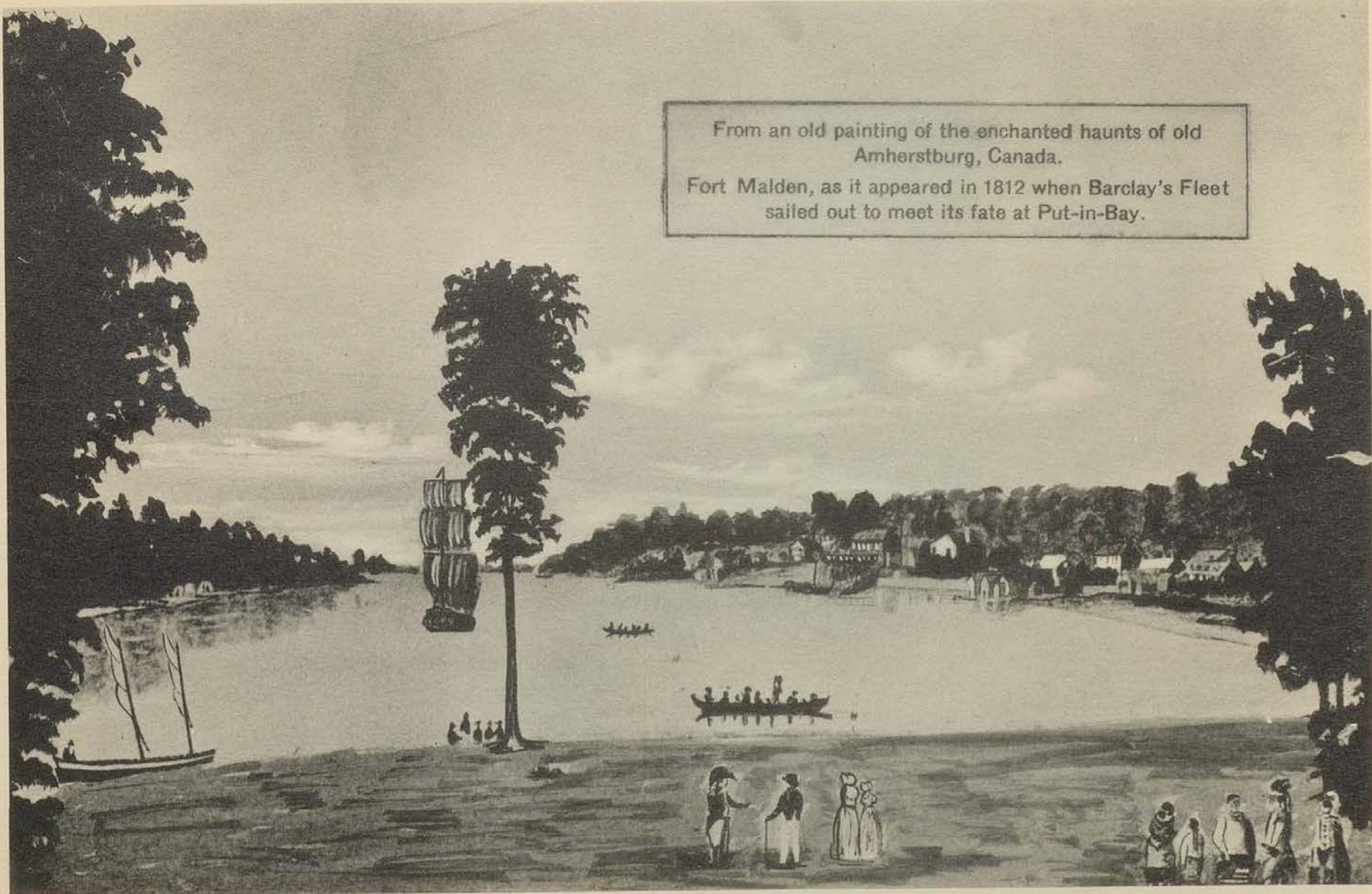




Between 1738 and 1791 many French Habitant Farms graced lands on Canadian side of Detroit River.

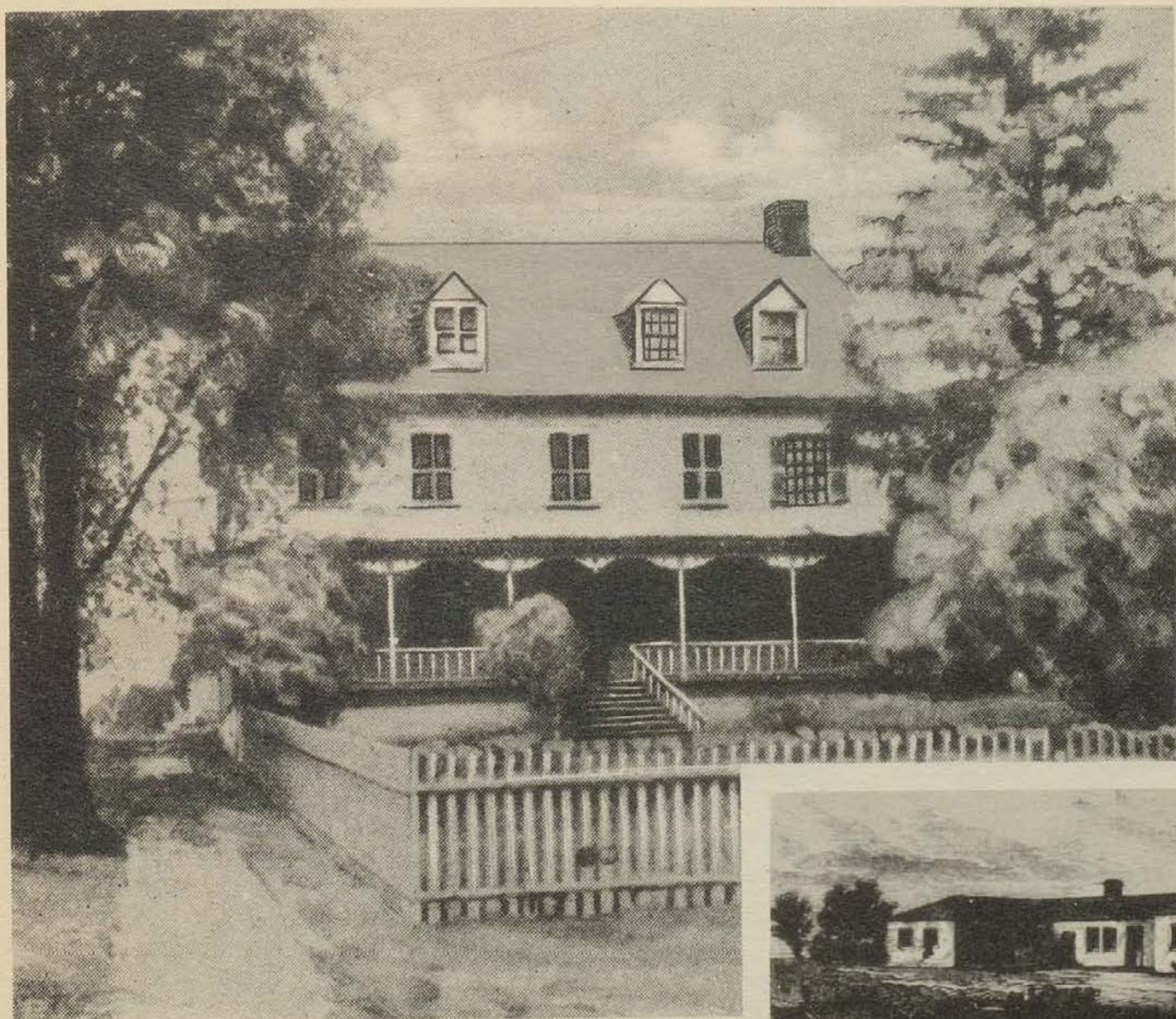


From an old painting of the enchanted haunts of old  
Amherstburg, Canada.  
Fort Malden, as it appeared in 1812 when Barclay's Fleet  
sailed out to meet its fate at Put-in-Bay.



When the British after the Revolutionary War gave up Detroit, they erected Fort Malden on the other side of the river  
Detroit, and Amherstburg was born.



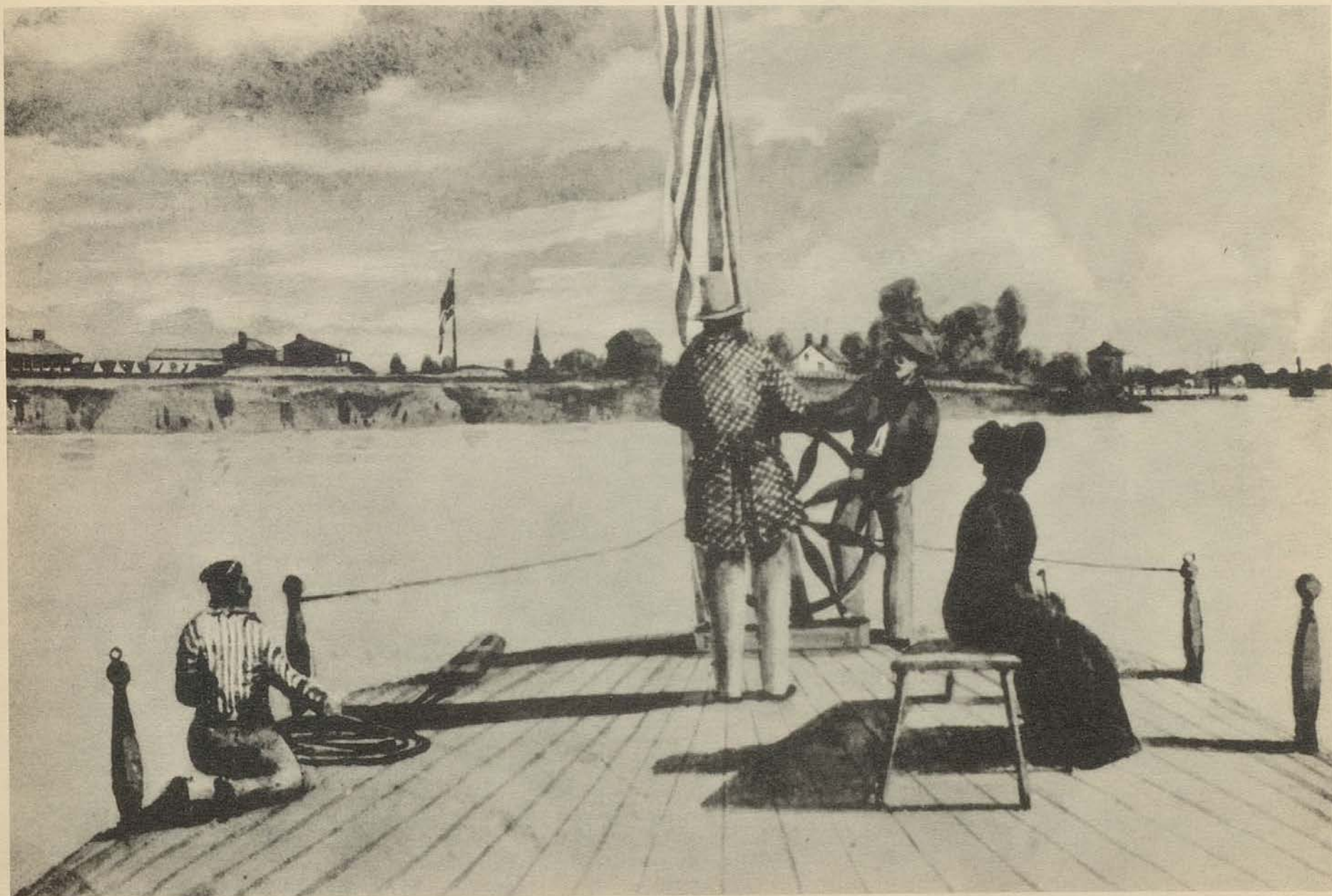


Colonel James Baby's residence, Sandwich, built in 1790 for fur trade. A most noted historical Canadian landmark.



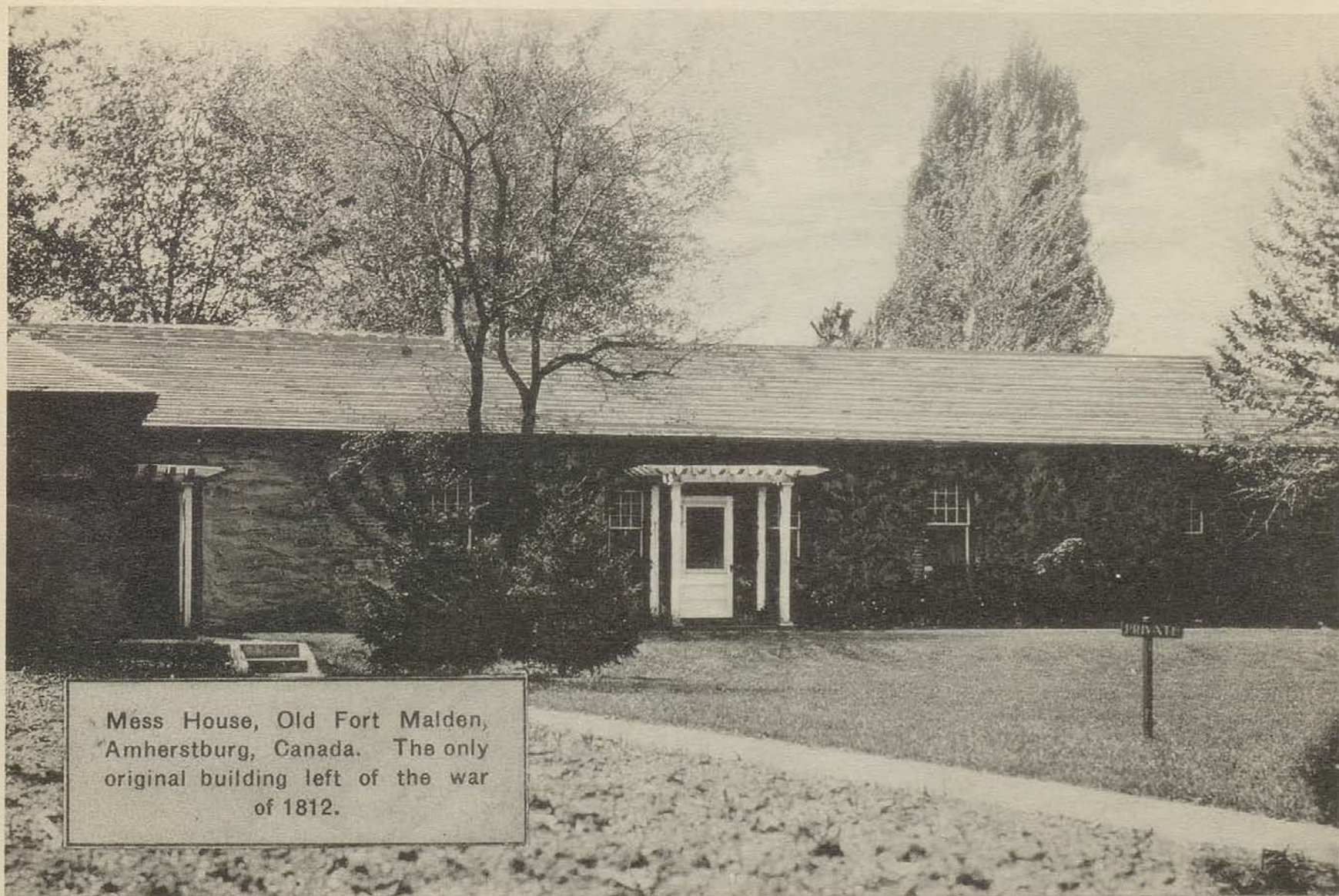
BARRACKS AT SANDWICH.





One of the earliest Ferries at Amherstburg in the early 1800's.





Mess House, Old Fort Malden,  
Amherstburg, Canada. The only  
original building left of the war  
of 1812.





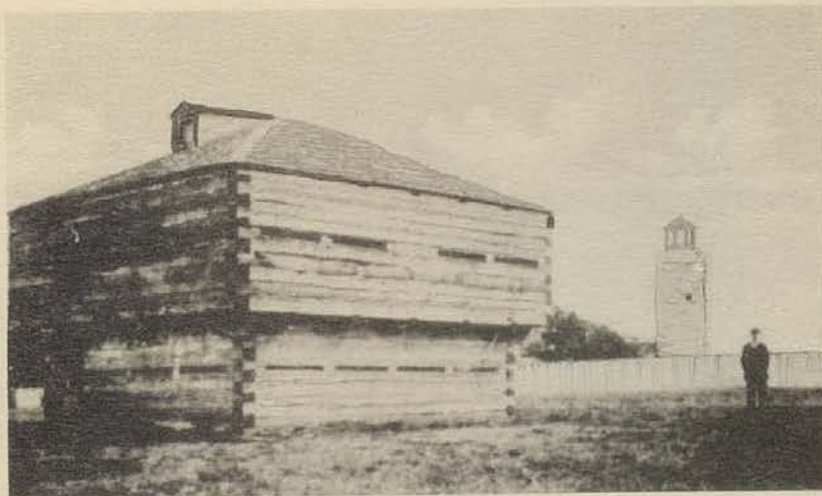
Christ Church, Amherstburg, erected about 1800. Dedicated 1819.





Amherstburg played an important role in the War of 1812, between Canada and the United States, as a military, social, diplomatic, and agricultural centre. As Amherstburg appeared then.





During War 1812 and early French Wars, Block Houses guarded islands of Detroit. This was one on Bois Blane Island.



Tecumseh, the great Indian Chief met General Brock near this point during the War of 1812. This was Tecumseh's barn, Amherstburg.



Amherstburg and territory was a Haven of safety for Negro slaves from the South.



This is the stone on which Tecumseh sat when he rebuked Proctor on his retreat.



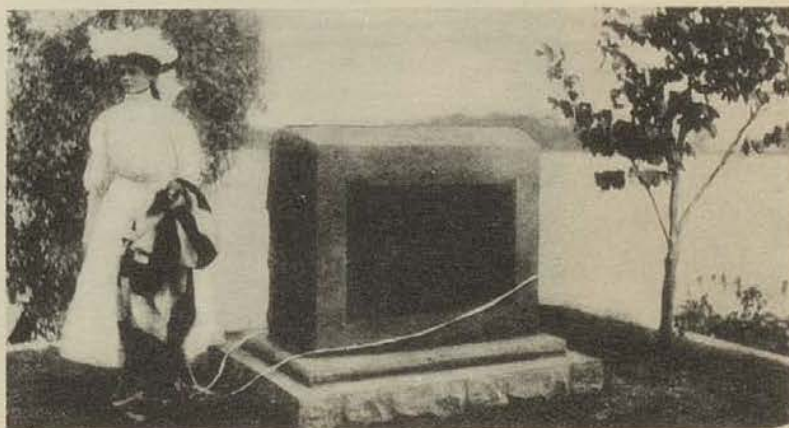


Major General Sir Isaac Brock, the hero of the War of 1812, who captured Detroit and built up Canadian defences on Ontario side of river at Windsor, Sandwich and Amherstburg.



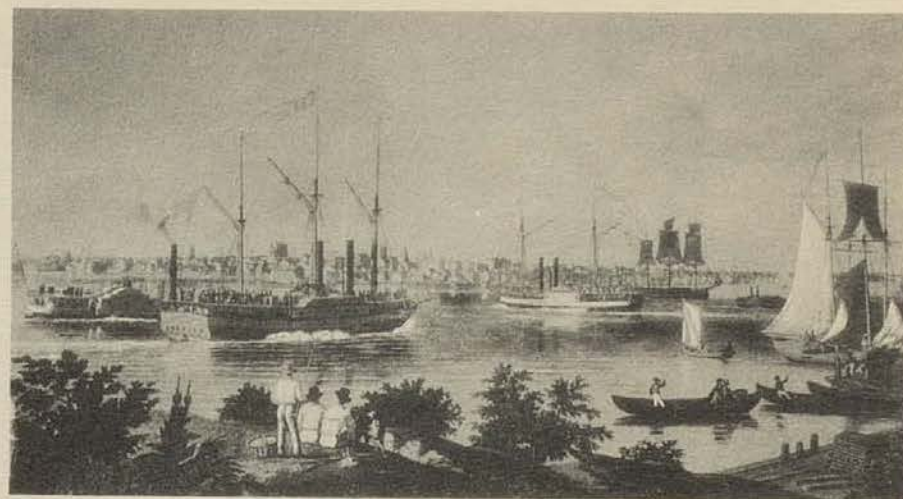
**"The Final Stand"**

Still comes romantically out of the years, memories of those who disputed gallantly the white man's advance.



Descendant of the first pioneers unveiling the Monument in memory of the Macombs, first owners of beautiful Grosse Isle.






Detroit Waterfront  
1838




Downtown Windsor from the air, Detroit River  
and City of Detroit in the background.



You may still thrill to some of these historic sights by  
visiting Essex County - - "The Vacation County"



Canada welcomes visitors and is quickly reached  
via bridge, tunnel or ferry, through Essex County.



For further information write to  
Essex County ( Ontario ) Tourist Assn.,  
1007 Canada Building,  
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